Mortician to be tried on charges of murdering rival with oleander

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The District Attorney's office announced it had filed a murder charge against a mortician accused of poisoning a competitor with oleander to stop him from revealing macabre cremation practices.

The case against David Wayne Sconce, 33, is believed to be the nation's first prosecution of a death by oleander poisoning, said Deputy District Attorney Harvey Giss.

Sconce, a former operator of the Lamb Funeral Home, will be tried in Ventura County for the 1985 death of Timothy Raymond Waters, 24, who ran the Alpha Society cremation service in Burbank, Giss said.

Sconce was charged with first-degree murder with the special circumstances of murder by poison, which could bring the death penalty with a conviction.

Arraignment was scheduled Feb. 26 in Ventura Municipal Court.

Giss said Sconce allegedly poisoned Waters to prevent him from telling authorities that Sconce was conducting multiple cremations — packing more than one body into ovens and making it impossible to determine whose remains were delivered to survivors.

The crematorium operator was sentenced to five years in state prison last September after he pleaded guilty to mutilating corpses, conducting mass cremations and stealing dental gold from bodies.

Witnesses testified at a preliminary hearing in that proceeding that Sconce had bragged about poisoning Waters.

Sconce also pleaded guilty in September to hiring thugs to beat up three competing morticians, including Waters, failure to bury the body of a baby girl and car theft.

murder charge

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